

Letters of Support

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27 Harold Road
Yorkley
Lydney
GL15 4SD

Chair, Planning Committee
Forest of Dean District Council

Dear Chair,

I would like to add my and my wife's names to those of the many local residents who have expressed support for the Yorkley Court Farm group's planning application.

As a Forest-born person who returned to the area and has now lived in Yorkley for some thirty years, I have only admiration for this group of (mainly) young people who are so committed to exploring new ways to live a sustainable existence here; we in Yorkley can be proud that our village is the subject of such an exciting and positive practical experiment. Living so close to the farm, we are aware of their low impact on the environment, their positive interactions with the community – and of their value in cooperating with other local producers to supply us with a weekly supply of excellent fruit and vegetables delivered to our door (as pensioners, particularly appreciated!). In the two years they have been living on the farm they have begun to establish vegetable gardens, managed the woodland, hosted courses and skillshares, and helped with the eco club at Yorkley Primary School and with preparatory work to create a new garden at Lydney Youth Cafe. They are working towards making Yorkley Court Farm a productive mixed agricultural holding and the farm has become an incubator for food and land-based enterprises and an educational hub for the local community for sharing skills around food and sustainable living.

As a writer, historian and cultural commentator (I have written several books on Yorkley and district, was a writer for The Guardian and worked for the British Council all over the world) I would like to express my conviction that the Yorkley Court Farm enterprise is a major and significant project that has not only immediate local benefits but a far wider importance: a serious response to the challenge of living according to principles, with integrity and with only the greater good in mind - but with sustainable practices. I, and I am sure councillors, should be proud that the Forest of Dean is the scene of such impressive practical work.

Because of my own commitment to the local community, albeit with no experience of farming or green activism, I was invited to be involved in the project's early days and sat for a while on its support group. I still see members around the village and can only be surprised and impressed by their perseverance in the face of hostility from vested interests whose actions suggest a very different set of values from the so-called eco-farmers. However I have had no involvement in their planning application, which I am told is for a five year period of temporary permission for them to reside in low impact dwellings on part of the land at Yorkley Court and is based on the obvious need to live on the land and so continue to work on the land sustainably and to develop the community

farm project.

It seems to me that it is indisputable that their work should be supported by all those who have our community's interests and, without exaggerating, the western world's long-term interests, at heart. The farmers who I am proud to be a neighbour of will only be able to continue this work if they are able to dwell on the land.

Sincerely

David and Ann Adams

Meadow Croft
Joyford
Coleford
Gloucestershire
GL16 7AR
ljthexton@yahoo.co.uk
23/7/14

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing in support of Yorkley Court Community Farm. I think it is wonderful that young people are prepared to act on their principles and promote local organic food growing and community spirit.

I am a very small producer of cakes and vegetables, selling at my local Country Market and now through the Food Hub, set up by Lynne of the Yorkley Court group. This enables me to do some of my baking to order rather than 'on spec', and reach a larger number of customers.

I have also benefited by 'buying' gardening work from other members, via the Forest of Dean LETS scheme using the local currency.

I understand that they want to build low-impact houses on the site, and think this is an excellent idea, developing useful skills in the area that they might share in the future, and showing their long term commitment to the site.

Yours sincerely,

Lesley Thexton

**Hillside □ Aston Bridge Road □ The Pludds □ Ruardean
Forest of Dean □ GL17 9TZ • 01594-861404 □ spraypludds@hotmail.com**

22 July 2014

F. a. o. Planning Officers, Forest of Dean.

Re - Yorkley Court Community Farm

I am writing in support of the group known as the Yorkley Court Community Farmers and their planning application. I cannot comment in detail on the application itself; but my general comments are that the group hope to establish themselves as a mature community, socially and economically integrated with and supportive of their neighbours and other people of the Forest, and sharing with them their skills and knowledge. They wish to use the ground of the farm productively and to the benefit of its wildlife, whilst minimising their impact on the immediate area and beyond. During their time at the Court, they have made a good start at this rather complex project, and have got the respect of many members of the Forest community.

Personally, I have had only limited contact with the Farm's members, but sufficient to be impressed by their abilities, willingness to work hard, *and* politeness towards and cooperation with others. I meet some of them at an organic gardening / seed and plant swapping group; my wife and I have employed them on garden construction work; and we have begun providing plants for their own gardens. We are interested in their attempts to increase the efficiency of local food production and distribution, and wish to support their efforts in this, as it could be a very welcome development within the Forest economy. This, again, earns them the respect of other people living in the Forest.

Sincerely -
Martin Spray

The Vines
Bailey Lane
Hewelsfield
Gloucestershire
GL15 6XE

01291 680092

27/7/14

To whom it may concern

I am writing in support of the **Yorkley Court Farm planning application**.

As someone local to the area I have seen the work that they do, both at the Yorkley Court site and at Forest events like the Forest Showcase. Their approach is inclusive and often aimed at getting children interested in growing fruit and veg, or seed saving.

The open days that they run from Yorkley Court are always informative and from my understanding they seem to have the support of quite a few local people who turn up on a regular basis.

Their contribution to the Forest through the Food Hub, a Yorkley Court initiative, is critical. This is exactly the kind of collaboration between local growers and producers that the Forest needs in order to regenerate our local businesses. The service they provide enables small scale growers and producers to reach new customers and cut down delivery trips.

Having a base at Yorkley where they can also grow their own produce, is important to the many other activities they provide the Forest such as collaborating with the local primary school.

It is important that we find ways to get younger people back on the land, and to give them access to land where possible.

We need to learn once again the rural skills that are part of our heritage, and represent the future for the diverse small scale economic model we should be embracing here in the Forest.

Yours

Matt Dunwell

Dear YCCF,

I have followed for two years the progress of the group at Yorkley Court which is making a planning application for low impact occupation of Yorkley Court.

I have been pleased to watch their growing integration with the local community and the progress they have made in forming a local food hub.

The group is a part of the international Via Campesina movement, publishes accounts of its work in The Land Magazine, counts serious graduates in sociology and agriculture among its members. Their suitability to occupy this ownerless property is much greater than is generally realised in the press.

There are at present very important organisations round the border of the Forest that are concerned with the development of community agriculture schemes, organic and biodynamic growing which have maintained a far greater richness of biodiversity in the Forest area than most other rural areas in the country. The Yorkley Court group are well aware of these organisations and works with them.

Yorkley Court could ultimately be sold to be joined into a larger conventional farming operation or for development. Neither of these options serves a vision of the Forest which is based on its unique value as an ecological study area, where a network of interested local people are clearly in favour of this because they involve themselves in the work at Yorkley Court.

As a former member of the Local Action Group with some experience of local initiatives I very much hope that the Yorkley Court application will be considered sympathetically.

Michael Dunwell.

22 July 2014

To whom it may concern

I am a permanent resident in the Forest of Dean and 'Friend of Yorkley Court', and would like to register my support for the Community at Yorkley Court Farm.

I've visited the Farm several times since the beginning of the Community's occupation and have particularly noticed their open, interactive and informative attitude towards neighbours and visitors. I'm particularly impressed by their commitment and practice in modelling low impact strategies for the environment, which I'm sure everyone supports. Between them the Community members have specialist knowledge in ecological land management and food production as well as practical recycling and sustainable technologies. They are enthusiastic in sharing their knowledge, both through workshops on the Farm open to the public and by outreach activities. For example two Farm members have recently attended local gardening/growing groups run by permanent Forest residents and shared their knowledge and practical ideas. As a member of the Yorkley/Blakeney group I have directly benefitted from their expertise.

I am impressed by the intelligence and responsible attitude of the Farm Community in pursuing their activities, and am convinced that they offer an alternative way of living that can be accommodated at Yorkley Court Farm.

Yvonne Allan
2 Mount Pleasant

New Road
Blakeney GL15 4DF
01594 517168

novy.allan@gmail.com

To whom it concerns

I understand that Yorkley Court Community Farm is about to submit a planning application to the Forest of Dean Council. They are applying for a permission to reside in low impact dwellings at Yorkley Court in order to farm the land and develop a community farm project and an educational hub for the local community for sharing skills around food and sustainable living.

I would like to register my support for their application. I have seen them for the last two years working on the land and in the community. They have already achieved a great deal under difficult circumstances, such as growing organic food for themselves and to sell, managing the woodland sustainably, offering courses to locals and so on. One of the many examples of them helping the local people was carrying out the pruning of apple trees in an orchard of one of my neighbours, who is elderly, for free.

They are a group of intelligent and brave young people committed to living sustainably and protecting our land and I believe they are a real asset to Yorkley and the Forest of Dean as a whole.

Vlasta Rhea
Birch Tree Cottage
City Lane
Yorkley

Field House
Yorkley Wood
Nr. Lydney
Glos. GL15 4TU

28th July 2014

The Planning Committee and Planning Officers
FoDDC
Coleford

Yorkley Court Community Farm Planning Application

Dear Sir,

My name is Andrew Darke, I am an artist, I've lived across the road from the boundary of Yorkley Court Farm in Yorkley Wood for 30 years. I've had work on the Sculpture Trail and was a trustee on the Trail for 13 years. Some years ago I worked with FoD councillors and the planning dept. trying to reduce the impact of mobile phone masts on the Forest of Dean landscape and the landscape of the UK.

In 2008 I accepted a Fellowship of the Royal Society of Arts for my work in art and the environment.

I expect you are already aware that I am a keen supporter of the Yorkley Court Community Farm project. The farm group has got sustainability, low impact living, organic food production and community involvement at the heart of its concerns and efforts. They want to create a community land trust for the whole of the Forest of Dean and have begun by establishing the Yorkley Court Community Farm. This will open the farm to small operators from the local area. The group will be stewards of the farm and the land and halt its decline until such time as the legal owners can be found. They have already established the Dean Forest Food Hub making cheap, wholesome, local food available. They are helping Yorkley Primary School make an organic garden and are also organising craft workshops. The group are bringing a new vision to the area.

There are currently a number of major proposals for development in the district, some of them in the Yorkley vicinity and all of them on green fields! Given the fact that none of these developments properly address the sustainability issues which are now so crucial to the maintenance of a benign climate, it is strongly in the interest of the whole district to support the YCCF project being the only one which *does* address sustainability issues fully. The YCCF application can be seen as a research project for the FoD which has the potential to show a way forward to sustainable farming, housing, and living. ie. It may become an important model for the future and we should be grateful and pleased about its creation here in the FoD.

Bearing in mind the recent statement from the IPCC that it is 95% certain that global warming is owing to human activity and that the average CO2 output per person in the UK is around 10 tonnes and that globally we need to be at only 2 tonnes per person, I believe the YCCF group with their strong, practical commitment to low impact living and non intensive farming has something to teach us.

I commend this project to the planning committee and ask for the committee's support. This project is at present a little seedling which, given help, may grow into a new great Oak for the Forest.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Darke FRSA

Lysia House
Church Square
Blakeney
GL15 4DX

23.07.2014

To whom it may concern

Yorkley Court Community Farm

My partner Chrissie and I have been visiting the Community Farm since the beginning of this year and have been privileged to meet the residents on many occasions since.

We have found them to be very receptive to helping us to learn about all sorts of things that we have been unfamiliar with such as growing vegetables in a sustainable manner. We will be purchasing all of our vegetables from them on the basis of them being local and grown in a sustainable manner.

We visit weekly and look forward to our time spent on the farm where we are always made to feel part of the community.

We welcome them into our community and believe that they are an important part of the sustainability of the Forest Of Dean.

We see them as a breath of fresh air and support them in all their endeavours.

Kind regards

Gary Melville
Chrissie Driessen

C/O Jacky Smith
Parkend Road
Coalway
Coleford
GL16 7HX

28th July 2014

Yorkley Court Community Farm Planning Application

Dear Sirs

I wish to place on record our support for the planning application being submitted by Yorkley Court Community Farm.

Over the last 2 years, the people at the farm have run a number of courses that have inspired local people to improve their lives, and helped many of the Transition projects such as the wood co-op, the Spring Fair, the energy group and Seed Savers. They have also supported other community groups, individuals and the local school.

Their garden has proved that all the land at Yorkley Court could be returned to useful productivity, despite its history, much to the astonishment of many local people who believed that it was so polluted that it could never be used again. However achieving this has required constant care and intensive work, and if they are to expand the area they can cultivate, they will need to live on-site and thus their plan for temporary homes on site is justified.

Talking to people at the recent open day, I was struck by the way that their hard work and commitment was providing a positive example to young people from Yorkley, who had never realised that working in harmony with nature could be both rewarding and enjoyable.

I feel that we should be doing all we can to retain this valuable resource for the Forest of Dean.

Jacky Smith
for Transition Forest of Dean

www.transitionforest.org.uk

July 26th 2014

Planning Department
Forest Of Dean District Council
Coleford
Glos

Dear Sir

Reference Yorkleigh Court Community Farm

Yorkleigh Court Community Farm are members of Dean Meadows Group and some of our committee have visited the farm to survey the meadows that are used by the farm community. We have visited twice in 2014 and recorded a total of 75 plant species in these meadow areas. This is a good level of species richness and should increase with continued management by light and rotated horse grazing.

Other parts of the site are mixed woodland in various stages of development and would yield more plant species as well as many invertebrates, birds and mammals if surveyed adequately.

The Community Farm is worked very sympathetically from the point of view of soil management and biodiversity. Dean Meadows Group would urge FODDC to allow the community to remain in order to protect the habitat there from destructive development or intensive agriculture.

Yours sincerely

Derek Foster
Secretary.

Dean Meadows Group
for advice and inspiration

www.Deanmeadows.org.uk

Secretary Derek Foster email DerekFost@aol.com, tel 01452 760296
Joey's Pitch Cottage, Pope's Hill, Newnham on Severn, GL14 1LE.

Yorkley Court Community Farm Allotment Days

I volunteer this to support the work of Yorkley Court Community Farm (YCCF) as it prepares a planning application, which includes offering the wider community its skills and occupations for 5 years. My knowledge of the farm is based on leisure walking from Lydney for approx 2 years and meeting the residents regularly at community events. I'm also a founder event organiser that has used for the past year, the Dean Forest Food Hub (DFFH) for 3 forest events.

The DFFH of YCCF has catered for our events (approx 400 people in total), efficiently, professionally and sensitively to all dietary requirements, times and needs. It is a not-for-profit social enterprise and as part of his work links local rural farms in a time of austerity and fierce competition for customers from online and supermarket shopping. It assists small business farming; ensuring more longevity of, and access to, local food produce. Thereby supporting the health, attractiveness and livelihoods of forest neighbourhoods. It retails out of the Camphill Trust (at Awre and Taurus Crafts); triggered and powered by energy and labour from YCCF.

<http://www.deanforestfoodhub.org.uk/hub/productlist.php>

For the past month I've joined the Sunday community allotment day where visitors share skills, production, all-age cohesion, recycle and co-operate in small teams. The day celebrates the central aims of good earth management and food production. Skills, food, meal times and planning come together with families and fast growing friendships. It's an opportunity for my family to meet interesting, intelligent and local folk with peaceful and educational aims. A pleasant surprise is that I now plan my own home allotment with fair confidence.

I sometimes attend with a friend who has MS. The farm is small, skilled and responsive enough to readily facilitate access needs. I've slept in a 'bender' (recycled pallet and boarded floors, sapling or willow frames and recycled tent coverings). They are simple; easily ventilated and storm proof. Great efforts are made to camouflage the structures and tuck them away so that the attractive surrounds are kept. When the materials are brought into a chosen plot, a hole in the surrounding veg is cut away, the materials put in and the structure built and then the veg replaced. There was good access to drinking water; toilets and showering.

I've observed this minority group of young farmers gently move into, for the most part a derelict and unused space and transform it into a vibrant, attractive, dynamic and energetic farm. Their work can be easily compared to the more 'up-to-date' methods of mass farming across the same fields where there has been planted a uniform one crop of corn. In comparison, that area's soil is leached and dry (there are no natural weeds, mulch, insects and variations of the more natural processes. That crop no doubt supports a moderate use of chemicals to achieve this). YCCF's natural balances are certainly needed for the whole care of the farm. The younger presence feels a type of mitigation towards a balance in the availability of mass and small food contracts.

People say that "competition" is good. However, having read supermarket and planning strategies for 2 years, I only see that local food production (a tourist attraction, health

approach and basic right) pitted against corporate sized production, is the same as pitting Para-olympic athletes against Olympian athletes. Local food plans are much needed in order to survive the current expectations of competition. I don't know of a government local food plan although it appears a growing theme in local ndp consultations. YCCF are already up and running, adapting to local need. Also the small but robust models like the one at YCCF, also keeps labour, profits and learning available deep within the communities.

I've attended many district, town, ndp, school, club and business meetings in the forest over 17 years and have to say that of all of them, YCCF meetings are the most polite (raising a hand to speak), organised, harmonious and productive. They are co-operative and work without any biased hierarchy. Allotment equipment is donated and fund raising for local and national organisations have happened and are planned. There is a weekly eco-club at the Yorkley Primary School. Youngsters in our schools are known dependents on convenience and microwaves and mostly unaware of the healthier, cheaper, more sustainable ways to 'shop', gather, cook and eat food. Even at this very challenging legal and financial time for YCCF, they are undeterred in their 'social work', land care and animal husbandry.

I trust the Local Planning Authority will do everything in it's power to return a better, indeed welcoming, response to their presence than certain members of our shameful community inflicted recently, with challenging ramifications still.

If YCCF need more creative assistance with regulatory and technical matters, I hope the LPA will give advice with reasonable expectation. At the same time I hope the LPA will recognise the group are innovative, organic and are, genuinely, Sustainable – in the truest sense of word meant by the National Planning Policy. They have proved they can respond quickly to individual situations. The young farmers are fully aware of the privilege of being able to use this land. It is evident in the very energy they give back to it and our communities. I believe it is us who are privileged to have this rare group among us teaching, learning too, and offering these agricultural services; providing their own housing, jobs (paid and unpaid) and 'home' education for visiting families, intrigued experts and national media. They are open to infrastructures locally and offer real solutions of their own. We know not all developers do that. How many local developments, some spending millions and years before one brick is laid, achieve these things, so robustly and so quickly?

I know that if I were a returning beneficiary to the land, I would be relieved that it had been looked after in these ways. It would be so much harder to return to a profit-making organisation, alert to possibilities of battle, and that had set down concrete. The only footprints likely to be left, and we could encourage, are of bringing education, jobs and communities together under the wonderful, basic aim of supplying and eating good food. I thoroughly support the principals of this planning application.

Yours sincerely

Fran Challice

5 Staunton Rd, Coleford, Forest of Dean, Glos, GL16 8DW

Letter of Support for Yorkley Court Community Farm

As a Forest resident, I write in support of the Yorkley Court Community Farmers and their planning application to enable them to live sustainably on some of the land at Yorkley Court in temporary buildings, and to farm this land. The Forest of Dean, like many rural areas, has a shortage of young people and I believe special provision should be made to welcome and encourage younger people to live and work in the Dean, including land based work such as in farming, horticulture and forestry. This provision should include some way of meeting their housing needs - for instance low cost and self build schemes. The District Council once had a 'homesteading' scheme which worked well in its time. We now need a new and updated scheme to meet the needs of today and into the future - not least to help achieve a balanced age range of Forest residents.

The Yorkley Court farmers come across as energetic and sincere in their wish to farm and garden sustainably and to involve themselves wholeheartedly in the local community - their work at Yorkley School, and in the setting up of the Forest Food Hub, are examples of this. Two members of the group helped us with putting up a small polytunnel, and they have also recycled old gardening tools, putting them to good use, and have run various workshops for the local community too. They have expressed interest too in tree growing and planting, and have a genuine and admirable ethos of care for the land along with low impact living. As I understand it they have a good relationship with their neighbours. Their ideas and energies are already starting to have an impact on the local economy, and there is potential for this impact to increase if they are able to live and settle in the area, for instance with the further development of the Food Hub.

In summary, I support their application, as I would like them to be able to stay in the area. They have a lot to offer. Out of interest, what is the average age of the people who will decide on the outcome of this application?

Sincerely,

Jane Spray, Dip.LA, MA 

Dear Yorkley Court Community Farm,

LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR YOUR PLANNING APPLICATION

I write in support of the planning application being made by the residents of Yorkley Court Community Farm (YCCF) to the Forest of Dean District Council (FoD DC).

I first visited Yorkley Court two years ago, not long after people moved onto the farm, and I have continued to visit ever since.

I have witnessed the perseverance and work of the group and find their energy and enthusiasm inspiring. I also see how, on top of all the challenges they face i.e. the lack of infrastructure and services we all take for granted (unless we live "off grid") they extend their activities into the wider community by participating in local events as individuals and as a group. Their commitment to co-operative living and consensus decision making is also challenging; this takes a while to get the hang of but is becoming established.

I go to the weekly Sunday community vegetable garden work days where I meet old friends and new people.

We may work alone or share a job with others, who may be other volunteers or be residents and we chat during our tea and cake break. Some of us are experienced gardeners, some are not, but we all learn as we go along. Some people bring their children and they, parents and kids alike, value the chance to get away from their computer screens. We pick what needs picking and take some produce home.

We are not only growing food, we are growing social cohesion, most notably across generations.

We see the weekly growth of our plants and of our friendships.

We are building healthy communities.

The group at YCCF face legal and planning demands that make a huge financial drain on them when they have no big company or other sponsors to ease this.

I wonder how much more progress they could make with the actual farming, food production and community and educational projects if they had security of tenure, enabling them to seek funding and proper financial backing.

I will be going to one of the Forest of Dean Local Action Group consultation events and will be suggesting that YCCF has the potential to match/fit all three categories, ie. business, tourism and community projects.

So I urge the FoD D C to accept their planning application and give them serious backing into the future.

I believe we would all be winners If this happens.

Yours

Jill Raymond

71 Woodside St
CINDERFORD
GL14 2NU